# O R A L  H I S T O R Y

## Marvin L. Plennert

### U. S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE
### OFFICE OF THE DIRECTORATE

**Interview**
**by**
**Jerry C. Grover**
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# ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

**with**

## MARVIN PLENERT

**by**

## JERRY GROVER

**FEBRUARY 1, 2002**

**ABSTRACT:** In a 33+ year career ending with his retirement in 1994 with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a common theme developed. It could be best described as cutting edge, contentious, adversarial but always successful as he came to know and understand the real biology and political aspects of some of the most controversial and contested issues and programs of the day. Some of the highlights described in this narrative begin with:

- The acquisitions of prairie wetlands at a time when one Government program was paying farmers to drain the land while another was trying to preserve valuable habitat for the Nation's waterfowl.
- In Alaska he was in the middle of the Native Claims Settlement Act on conflicting claims of selecting Native lands vs. land set aside as National Wildlife Refuge areas.
- The identification and acquisition of numerous land areas to be entered in the National Wildlife Refuge System in a climate of competing land use controversy.
- As the Regional Director for the Pacific Region embroiled in some of the more controversial Endangered Species Act listings [read spotted owl, California gnatcatcher, and seeming like everything in Hawaii], Klamath River Basin and California's San Francisco Bay / Delta water and wildlife issues, all at a political level reaching to the White House.

Throughout, he kept and maintained a sense of the value of the career people, a sense of fairness of values and an outspoken and a clear willingness to make a decision based on the biology and facts at hand. This ability earned him the Department of Interior's highest awards and the respect of his fellow Service employees.

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MR. GROVER: This is Jerry Grover, a retired Ecological Services & Fishery supervisor in the Portland Regional Office to do an oral history on Marv Plenert at his home in Oregon City, Oregon, regarding his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. With me is my wife Judy, formerly Marv's Administrative Assistant, and Carol Plenert. Marv, for the record what was your job when you retired?

MR. PLENERT: Well, for the last five years of my career with the Fish and Wildlife Service I was the Regional Director for Region 1, which is the Pacific Northwest. It included the states of California, Nevada, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii and the Trust Territories of the Pacific. It was quite a large area.

MR. GROVER: Marv, tell us a little about yourself. Where were you born? And how did you get interested in, or get started in fish and wildlife?

MR. PLENERT: Well, I grew up on a farm in Kansas. I probably got interested in fish and wildlife resources and management because I liked to hunt and fish. I guess that was probably everybody's dream way back then. So I ended up going to Kansas State University. First I went to a small college in my hometown for a couple of years. That was Taber College in Hillsborough, Kansas. And then I went into the Army.

MR. GROVER: Was that your hometown, Hillsborough?

MR. PLENERT: Yes, Hillsborough was my hometown. That's where my wife Carol is from too. She's from Hillsborough as well. Our families knew each other when we were growing up. I went to college there for two years and then I went into the Army for a couple of years. Then when I came out I went to Kansas State at Manhattan, Kansas, and got my bachelor's degree in Biology and then my master's in Wildlife Management. I graduated in 1961 with my master's degree.

MR. GROVER: How did you and Carol get together?

MR. PLENERT: Well I've known her all of my life, I suspect. And I guess when I got out of the Army we kind of got serious in the late 1950's and started dating. Then we got married in 1958. We had two children, a boy and a girl. She worked and helped me get through college. You know how it was in those days. Of course I had the GI bill but still, she helped me get through.

MR. GROVER: What did you do in the Army?

MR. PLENERT: I was stationed in Fort Bliss, Texas believe it or not. I was in the guided missile program. It was kind of the first ground to air missile program. It was in the late 1950's, 1956 I guess. Then we got shipped over to Germany. I spent a year over in Germany and then I got discharged from there. I was in for two years that's all.

MR. GROVER: After Kansas State, did you go right to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MR. PLENERT: Yes I did. After I got out of school I had several job offers. In fact, they weren't very plentiful in those days and were really few and far between for anybody in wildlife management but I was lucky and had several. You'd have to work for a state or for the federal government, they were the only ones with those type jobs. There wasn't any body in the private sector that was hiring people. So I had a job offer with the State of Kansas. I had applied with the Fish and Wildlife Service and got a call from Region 3, headquartered in Minneapolis. The call came from Goodman Larsen who was the Personnel Director there. Goodman T. Larsen, I'll never forget him. He offered me a job in North Dakota. Well, I had a choice of North or South Dakota. It was with the Wetlands Program, and I'll get into that in a little while. So I just went right from College, to Jamestown, North Dakota. That's where they offered me the job. The pay wasn't very much but in those days it was better than nothing. The federal job was probably one thousand dollars more that what the state had offered me for a year.

MR. GROVER: Were you started as a GS-5?

MR. PLENERT: A "7". I started as a GS-7 because I had a master's degree. We moved to North Dakota in a little U-Haul trailer from Kansas. We hauled everything we had, which wasn't much. At that time Jamestown was just a small town. There were probably seven or eight thousand people. There wasn't any place to rent. There were no houses, apartments or anything. We finally conned some guy into renting me a little house. We lived in a rental house because I couldn't afford to buy one. We rented the whole time we were there.

When I started off, the issue was the Wetlands Drainage Program. It was the government's USDA subsidized drainage that they paid farmers a cost share to drain wetlands off of their agricultural lands. Of course this was in direct conflict with the Fish and Wildlife Service, which wanted to protect the wetlands. It's another case of two agencies in the federal government having separate mandates and having both of them different. I mean, here we are dealing with Agriculture doing away with habitat, and we're trying to protect it. They came up with using Duck Stamp money to preserve and protect the small Wetlands Program. My job when I first went there was to look at what they called drainage referrals. The farmers would fill out a little sheet. They would go at that time to the ASCS, the Agricultural Stabilization Committee. It was separate from the CSC, which did the technical work. They would fill out a little map. We'd get the map in Fish and Wildlife and we would go out and look at what was there.

There was probably twelve biologists hired at that time in Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota and we'd go out and look at these wetlands and if they had high values to wildlife, we'd tell them that we didn't think they should be drained. And they would just take it with a grain of salt and drain them anyhow. It didn't matter. The only way that you could protect them was to buy them or… So then the Fish and Wildlife Service came up with a wetland acquisition program. They would either buy them or take easements on wetlands. This was in the prairie pothole region, the glaciated country and there were potholes everywhere. There were large ones, small ones, both temporary and permanent. So the theory was at that time to acquire a major permanent one in one or two per township and then take easements on the rest. That way the land would stay on the tax roll. At that time land was selling for between six and eight dollars an acre. You could buy the whole countryside in that glaciated country for six to eight bucks an acre. That was in the early 1960's. Our job was to define the wetlands that were being considered… go look at them if they were going to drain them, or delineate which ones we thought the Service should buy.

Then they set up an acquisition program in Jamestown as well. The key people that were there was Harold Benson who was a long time Realty guy in Region 3 and 4. There was Tom Smith who was in Albuquerque when he retired. They were there as the first acquisition biologists in Jamestown. We worked together and identified areas that should have been bought. If we'd have had money, or cash, we could have bought the whole county. But we didn't have it. We had to borrow money from the wetlands, Duck Stamp funds and there was only so much money available. The program was really a success. They called it the Accelerated Wetlands Program, and I think it's still going on.

MR. GROVER: You didn't have the money, but how many acres, roughly, were you able to set aside?

MR. PLENERT: I can't remember. There were millions in all of the states. We had a problem too, that if we bought too many acres in a given county the County Commissioners would get up in arms because it was land taken off of the tax roll. We paid, or the government did, three quarters of one percent of in-lieu taxes. But it still wasn't as much as if there was a farmer living on the land. So we had problems with the County Commissioners. And we had to go meet with the Governors. In some of the counties we did really well. We preserved a lot of habitat. It was really a good program. In fact, Dick Mundinger who was in the regional office in Minneapolis and later moved to Region 1, was instrumental in the Program too. Actually when I transferred from North Dakota to Montana, Dick was instrumental because Montana was in Region 1. He helped get them in the program and they weren't a part of the original acquisition program. Then I left Jamestown.

MR. GROVER: When was that?

MR. PLENERT: In 1966. Dick [Mundinger] was instrumental in getting a position in Montana for wetland acquisition and to look at drained wetlands. It was because the moraine glaciated area extended into two or three counties in Montana. And these were just as good as wetlands or just as many, but we didn't have a program there. So I started the program there and did all of the delineations of all the wetlands. We hired an appraiser. Bob Miller was, I think, the first guy and he ended

up retiring in Boston, in Region 5. We started the program and preserved lots of wetlands there too.
MR. GROVER: What was your grade at that time?

MR. PLENERT: I was a "9" when I was first there. Then I got promoted to GS-11. When I was in Montana I received the first and only reprimand I ever got from the Fish and Wildlife Service. It was for what I thought was doing a good job. But I didn't realize the difference between Regions. Region 3 was very, very assertive on wetlands and acquisition and waterfowl management. Region 1, which Montana was in at that time, before they reorganized, was very conservative. If it wasn't in Oregon, or along the coast, they really didn't get any approval. Dave Marshall was the wildlife biologist that really did all of the approving of wetland acquisition. I had an opportunity on the north shore of Flathead Lake, which is in the Flathead Valley; the whole north shore was undeveloped. It had values other than just waterfowl. It was a big staging area for probably all of the Redheads and Canvasbacks in that area. They had Osprey and Eagles as well. I found out that the people wanted to sell it. So I went over and talked to them. I reported to the regional office that it was for sale. It was cheap. It was a hundred bucks an acre or less. The first thing I got was a note back saying, "We're not interested". Well, I couldn't accept that so I contacted Senator [Lee] Metcalf. He was the senior Senator for Montana. Well no, I guess the other guy was, I can't remember his name. [Mike] Mansfield and Metcalf were very, very instrumental in conservation efforts. In fact, Metcalf was Chairman of the Migratory Bird Commission that approved land acquisition for the Service. He was a prime member. At that time, John Dingle from Michigan was too. So I contacted Metcalf and told him about this area. I even took him out there and showed him. The next think I knew, the money showed up in Region 1's budget. They kind of tied two and two together and found out that I had done this. Of course I got a reprimand for it. But they ended up using the money. The bought the area and it's a fantastic area. But that's kind of interesting, how things happen. I really didn't think about doing anything wrong. I thought about preserving the area.

MR. GROVER: Is that area part of a National Wildlife Refuge now?

MR. PLENERT: Yes, it is.

MR. GROVER: What the name of it?

MR. PLENERT: There's a wetlands complex out of Kalispell that manages the north shore area of the Flathead Valley. Really, it's a complex under the National Bison Range, which is in the southern Flathead Valley by Paulson. The Manager has an assistant in Kalispell who does the wetland work. There is the Flathead, and the Nine Pipe National Wildlife Refuges that are all one complex. But it's a fantastic area. What they were going to do was dredge the area and fill the beaches and build houses. I decided that I didn't think that was a good idea. I proposed it for acquisition and it didn't go very well in the regional office. But at that time Vernon Ekedahl was the Assistant Regional Director, which is Refuge Supervisor. I guess that's what they called them at that time. And John Finley was the Regional Director. They were a pretty conservative bunch. They didn't think that some GS-11 should be proposing things like that.

Then after we kind of finished the wetlands program, I was asked to do the Wilderness Studies for Region 1. So I stayed right in Montana. And after the Wilderness Bill was passed, I think this was in late 1968 or something like that, so for two years I did wilderness studies on the major, large National Wildlife Refuges in Region 1. I worked on the Desert Refuge, Sheldon and Hart Mountain in Nevada, and C. M. Russell and Medicine Lake in Montana.

MR. GROVER: Were you stationed in Montana the whole time while you were doing this?

MR. PLENERT: Yeah, I was in Lewistown. I worked out of Lewistown at the headquarters for the C. M. Russell range. Oddly enough, one of the things that is kind of interesting; as I said, about like the Wetlands Program, the guy that was instrumental in blowing the whistle on the Agriculture for draining wetlands was a guy by the name of Fred Staunton. He was the Manager at Waubay Refuge and Wetland complex in South Dakota in the late 1950's. He saw all of these wetlands being drained and people were getting paid to do it. He got a Field and Stream magazine editor out there and they took some pictures, and wrote an article in Field and Stream. That really started the work of putting a stop to the cost-share drainage and that sort of thing. Fred ended up as the Refuge Manager at C. M. Russell while I was there. He was the Manager of that million-acre refuge. And issues there were another set of issues that we worked on, not only in conflict with the Department of Agriculture, but with our own Department of the Interior. That was BLM [Bureau of Land Management]. In those days when it was originally set up, the criteria was that BLM would manage the grazing under the Taylor Grazing Act. The Fish and Wildlife Service would manage the wildlife. They were just incompatible. There were conflicts just one after the other. Fred was right in the middle of that. Then in about 1970, the Secretary of the Interior, Wally Hickle, gave the whole National Wildlife Refuge to the BLM. He signed an order, abolished it and gave it to the BLM. Well then, the conservation organizations got up in arms and raised all kinds of heck. Then Congress passed a law that turned it all over to the Fish and Wildlife Service and got BLM out of there. Then the Fish and Wildlife Service managed the whole thing. So it was kind of a real fight with an agency within in the Department of Interior again. My whole career was kind of dotted with those kinds of conflicts, I think, from the time I started to the time I retired.

After Montana, I applied for a job in Alaska in 1971. Dave Spencer was the long-time Alaska Refuge Supervisor. He was up there his whole career. He flew there during World War II, and just stayed in Alaska with the State. Well, it was a Territory then. But Dave Spencer was the Refuge Supervisor and I worked as his Assistant in 1971. Then about 1973 or 1974 they passed the Alaskan Native Land Claims Settlement Act, which required that the natives had a chance to select lands around their villages. There was a township or two or

three, depending on the size of the village. Now you had to enroll back to those villages so they'd be eligible for land and the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] was involved in getting the enrollment. They were enrolling people back to villages that didn't exist. They just weren't there. They were just names on a Drainage [report] or something. and they called them a village so they would get land; like up to a full township around each one of these so-called bogus villages. I went to Gordy Watson who was the Area Director as it wasn't a region yet, we were still under Region 1, and I told him about this. And I went to the Solicitor. The same Department of Interior Solicitor who represented the BIA represented us, and I got nowhere with him.

So on my own, I filed a protest. I just did it. I wrote a letter. It was in the enrollment provisions that you could protest. So I filed a protest, and signed my name. The next thing I knew, I got a called from [Lynn] Greenwalt who was the Fish & Wildlife Service Director at the time. He asked me what I thought I was doing. I said, "well, they're taking lands that don't belong to them," and I told him, "I'm filing a protest." Well, I didn't know anything about the law, and when you do things in a legal way you're supposed to serve notice to both parties and I didn't. I didn't send the other lawyers a letter. I did it all illegal. But anyway, they put a stop to it. Again, John Dingle who I mentioned earlier, got involved. I contacted him. He was a friend of ours and he put a stop to this, and made the Department of the Interior assign a separate Solicitor to Refuges to work with me. I had to work with the Solicitor to put a stop to these bogus villages. We had hearings and they sent out federal Judges and we had to line up witnesses. They gave me a Solicitor in San Francisco to work with. He was a young man. I can't think of his name now. We built a heck of a case. There must have been six hundred thousand acres that we were successful in keeping in the National Wildlife Refuge System, or we'd have had to buy them back at a later date. So it was very positive and it all turned out pretty good. These villages didn't exist and we showed it -- they just weren't there. That was one of my interesting Alaska [experiences]. Then I got involved in selecting new refuges.

MR. GROVER: Did you get promoted when you went up to Alaska?

MR. PLENERT: Yeah, I did. I got promoted to a GS-12 at that time which I thought was a pretty good deal because you got a twenty-five percent cost of living adjustment. It wasn't that bad up there. It was a fun place to live. There were great people. I got involved in day-to-day Refuge activities. I got to fly around the whole State. Then we got involved in looking for new lands under the Land Claims Act to go into the Refuge. I felt I had a part of selecting all of the new Refuges as well. That was very gratifying.

I got a chance to witness the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. I saw all the pipe lying there, and they put it in and that was a kind of an historic event. You know, to open up the big oil field up there, and pump all of the oil down to Valdez and haul it away in tankers. Also during that period of time in Alaska, the Fish and Wildlife Service embarked on a program management system. Rather than manage by functions, or get your funds by function, they embarked on this system. I don't know, the people that devised it, the Lynn Greenwalts of the world, the Directors probably liked it. But for the people in the field it was really difficult to manage your functions by program. In the case of Refuges we had Public Use programs, Migratory Bird programs. We also had Mammal programs. If any one of the Program Managers didn't fund a portion of it, you were left with two thirds of a budget. And it was really a program that I thought was one of the worst that the Fish and Wildlife Service ever organized. But anyway, at that time they reorganized and brought in new people so to speak, called Assistant Regional Directors. Of course Dave Spencer being a long-time independent sort of guy had enough of it, and he retired. Then I got his job up there.

And I got promoted to a GS-13 before I left Alaska. I got the job as Refuge Supervisor but then they brought an ARD over me, who supervised me. He was between me, and the Director. They made Alaska a full Region and Gordy Watson became a Regional Director. That was in the late 1960's. And in the early 1970's they brought in Jan Riffe who was the ARD. He was a research guy who came in as the ARD for Refuges and Wildlife they called it. He was my supervisor then.

MR. GROVER: So they had Jan Riffe as the Assistant Regional Director, you were the Regional Supervisor for Refuges, and then what else was in there? Did they have Wildlife Services?

MR. PLENERT: ADC [Animal Damage Control] kind of went after the Statehood left in 1959. We really didn't have an ADC program. There was one person. Most the ADC work was carried on by the State, not the Feds, in Alaska, which was a good thing. We had a Migratory Bird program, you know, eagles and migratory bird surveys and that sort of thing, and then Refuges. Those were the only two. We didn't have a Realty program. We didn't have anything because we didn't have a land acquisition program. It was a very lean operation. We had three people in Refuges.

MR. GROVER: That was in Anchorage?

MR. PLENERT: In the Anchorage regional office.

MR. GROVER: How many folks did you have out in the field?

MR. PLENERT: Probably thirty-five, or thirty-five to forty. There were more in the summertime with temporaries. I think there were seven full-time Refuges Managers and all of their assistants and clerks and that sort of thing. Of course, everybody flew. Everything was flying. All of the Refuge Managers were airplane pilots, and they served the dual purpose as pilots and managers. A lot of their biologists flew as well. It was the only way you could get around. I stayed up there until 1977. I went up there in 1971 and left in 1977. I applied for a job in Denver, as assistant to the ARD for Refuges and Wildlife who was Jerry Wilson at the time. He was my supervisor then. I left Alaska. It was a tough thing to do because Alaska was a very fun place to work. We liked it up there a lot. But my son was getting ready to go to college.

It was his last year in high school and he wanted to go to college in Boulder, Colorado. We had a chance to go to Denver, so I did. I was the Assistant for Refuges and Wildlife, Assistant Regional Director for Wildlife. One of my primary functions in Denver was that I supervised what we called the Refuge Supervisors. We had nine states under Region 6. During that time they reorganized the regions too. Montana went from Region 1 to Region 6. Wyoming went from Region 2 to Region 6. Kansas went from Region 2 to Region 6. Then Iowa and Missouri went from Region 3 to Region 6, and later went back to Region 3. We had twelve states originally.

MR. GROVER: Did that include North and South Dakota?

MR. PLENERT: North and South Dakota and Nebraska and Utah and Wyoming. We had all of those Refuges. And there were three Refuge Supervisors who I primarily supervised. Then I had ADC also. We had an ADC Supervisor in the Regional office and I was in charge of all of those programs. I did that off and on for almost ten years while I was there. I saw a lot of changes. The program management system got abolished. No, I guess that was the Area Offices. They went to an Area Office system in the early 1970's. Was that when it was?

MR. GROVER: Area Offices came in 1977 and lasted for five years.

MR. PLENERT: Ok, that's right. When I went to Denver, that's when they went to the Area Office system. Of course, we had to work through that. The Area Office was like a mini Regional office. You had to deal with another layer. Although in some states, depending on the Area Manager, it worked really good. The system wasn't all that bad, depending on who was in charge of what. I saw that come and go. I think it went out in 1977.

MR. GROVER: It came in in 1977 and left at the end of the fiscal year in 1982.

MR. PLENERT: That's when Bob Jantzen from Arizona was the Director.

MR. GROVER: He came in right after that.

MR. PLENERT: I think he was responsible for it because he had some bad dealings in Arizona with Area Managers or something.

MR. GROVER: I thought Lynn Greenwalt was still on watch. He started it and ended it, I thought.

MR. PLENERT: I don't think so. I think Bob Jantzen was the guy that ended it. I am sure he was. Well anyway, of course in Region 6, I had many of the states that I had worked in in the early years. It was like going home. I had worked in North and South Dakota, Nebraska and of course Kansas was in the same Region. Jerry Wilson was there and he retired a couple of years after I got there. I served as acting ARD probably as many years as I was there. Then they brought in Earl Baysinger from Washington, who was in Research. He didn't do very well. He didn't go over very well with the job. He just wasn't equipped for it. He lasted two years. Then they brought in Nels Kverno. He was a good Norwegian. He lasted about that long too. Of course Region 6 had three different Regional Directors while I was there. When I first went there Harvey Willoughby was the Regional Director. He was a long-time Fishery Biologist, and a very good man in my opinion. When he retired, Lynn Greenwalt hired Don Minich from Colorado. He was a Planner with the State of Colorado. He was there for a couple of years and they moved him on into Washington, D. C. Then Galen Buterbaugh came out as the Regional Director. I stayed in Denver until 1988. Then of course, Frank Dunkel became the Director in Washington. Bob Jantzen had left and Dunkel was given the job. I got a chance to go into Washington D. C. as the Deputy Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife, which I went into then.

MR. GROVER: And was that a promotion?

MR. PLENERT: Yeah, well I got promoted when I went to Denver to a GS-14. Then I got promoted to a "15" when I went in to D.C. I was there for a year. Jim Gritman was in there as the Assistant Director for Refuges and he went back to Region 3 and I got the job as Assistant Director for Refuges and Wildlife. That was another promotion to the SES level.

MR. GROVER: You are Assistant Director now, for Refuges and Wildlife in D. C. You moved up to the SES level. In that time did you go to "charm school"?

MR. PLENERT: No, I didn't. I just got a field promotion. I didn't have to go to charm school, or didn't go. I was selected for the job, and approved, and never did.

MR. GROVER: You never did go, even after the fact?

MR. PLENERT: Even after the fact. I scheduled it a couple of times, but it just never fit into my schedule and I never did go.

MR. GROVER: What about other training that led you up the ladder to now one of the upper echelons?

MR. PLENERT: Oh, I got lots of training but I don't remember… short courses.

MR. GROVER: The Refuge Academy?

MR. PLENERT: I went to the early Refuge Academy. They had a real early one in Minnesota. I can't remember the name of it. But I went to a week of Refuge Training in Minneapolis. But then they moved it to Glencoe or someplace like, but I didn't go.

MR. GROVER: You didn't go to the Departmental Manager Training Program, DMTP?

MR. PLENERT: No I did not.

MR. GROVER: So, you rose right up to the top, unencumbered?

MR. PLENERT: Unencumbered. Yeah, I didn't go to any of those charm schools. Maybe that's cause I didn't have any charm, I don't know. But I came up from the bottom, and worked my way right up to the top. Of course, I had a lot of help doing it. You don't get those jobs unless somebody helps you. That's the way it works. I did get selected for the Assistant Refuge Director-the Director for Refuges and Wildlife and served about a year. I was in D.C. for a total of two years. And then the Region 1 job became available. The Director asked me if I wanted to go to Region 1 and I said, "No", I really didn't want to go. I knew the issues and all of the problems out in the Northwest and I really didn't want to go. Although I would have loved to go to Portland, but I really didn't want the responsibilities. I had never even read the Endangered Species Act. I had no idea what that was all about, and didn't really care. You know, I was working in Refuges and Wildlife and didn't really get involved in those kinds of things. The Director kept asking me if I wanted to go and finally I said, "Yes." So I was transferred to Portland as the Regional Director in 1988.

MR. GROVER: So now you are in Portland as the Regional Director in 1988, and had yet to read the Endangered Species Act.

MR. PLENERT: That's right.

MR. GROVER: How was your first week on the job?

MR. PLENERT: It was interesting. I think that one of the reasons that I felt kind of at ease as a Regional Director was because I had worked in a Regional Office for ten years. I had worked real close with Regional Directors. I had kind of an idea of what he was supposed to do. I had acted as a Regional Director several times in Denver. I had worked in four different Regions during my career before I went back to Region 1. That part didn't worry me all that much. But I was a little nervous about the Ecological Services Program and the Endangered Species end of it. Believe me, I had no idea. I finally took a crash course in the Endangered Species Act. There was a young fellow who they had assigned as an Assistant Regional Director by the name of Robert Smith. He was back in Washington in the Departmental Training Program when I was there. He got assigned out to Portland as the Ecological Services ARD. He probably knew as much about the Endangered Species Act as anybody in the Service at that time. He helped me tremendously to get me up to speed on the issues and what was involved with the Endangered Species Act. And of course the first week or ten days I was in Region 1, there was a lawsuit filed of the listing of the spotted owl, or non-listing of the spotted owl. I got thrown into that one with both feet, immediately; with the Forest Service, logging issues and BLM and of course the economic factors in what was probably the largest listing of any of them that the Service had had up to that date. Of course it went to court and the Judge didn't rule that we had to list the owl, but that we had to make a decision. And of course, the Director was getting it from all sides in Washington from a political point of view to make a decision.

MR. GROVER: Who was the Director then?

MR. PLENERT: Dunkel. Frank Dunkel was the Director. The biology all pointed to the need to list the owl. And one of the things that I had made up my mind on was, as I had watched Regional Directors of the years and they are subject to political intervention and probably a lot of it in some areas. I had watched Regional Directors that catered to the whims of politicians and also listened to their biologists. The ones that catered to the politician were usually the ones that had the shortest careers. Because if one time you didn't go along with the politicians, a Congressman's or Senator's request, your term was pretty short lived. So I decided when I went out to Region 1 that I would rely on biology and I was old enough that if I got fired, it wouldn't have mattered. I decided that I would not make decisions based on politics. And so I made the decision that we would list the spotted owl. I recommended it based on the biology and pushed it and the listing proposal went all of the way through. Of course they had summit hearings with Senator Hatfield and Senator Packwood from Oregon, and all four of the Congressmen from here at the time. They had a summit meeting and I had to go appear before them. I got grilled really bad. I just used biological terms. I didn't talk about acerphy [sic] I just said that I didn't know what 'board feet of timber' was. I didn't have any idea of what that was all about. I knew that the owl was endangered and that logging and other practices were causing it, and let it go at that. And we prevailed.

Shortly after that the desert tortoise came up in Nevada and Utah. It covered a tremendous amount of area and the same problems surfaced there that surface any time you have a listing of that magnitude. The City of Las Vegas was expanding. The tortoises were found in downtown Las Vegas on all of the bare lots. They would get out there with bulldozers and dig up desert tortoises so we listed the tortoise and ran into a monstrous problem with developers and that sort of thing as well. So my first year was a real baptism as a Regional Director. I know that we had some of the largest listings of the Endangered Species Act of any up to that time. In California there was the gnatcatcher, the marbled murrelet on the coast of Oregon. In the Fisheries side there were several suckers, which people didn't think have any value to anybody. The Indian tribes utilized that species quite heavily in Nevada.

MR. GROVER: Is that the Qui-ui you're talking about?

MR. PLENERT: Yes, the Qui-ui in Nevada and then the two sucker species in the Klamath River Basin area. We listed those early in my tenure here. And it was really not that much fun. But it was kind of gratifying that we made it through all of those listings. Of course of the States in Region 1, California and Hawaii probably had the largest number of endangered species of any state in the Union at that time. I don't have any idea of how many species we listed while I was the Regional Director, but it was over a hundred or more.

MR. GROVER: You say that biology prevailed in those decisions?

MR. PLENERT: Every time. We had countless lawsuits. If you listed something, the development community would sue you. It would be the loggers or the developers in Nevada or the home developers in California. And every Judge ruled in our favor, every time. We never lost a lawsuit based on biology, ever. Again, we were dealing with other government agencies that had conflicting mandates. BLM was in the timber business as well as the Forest Service.

MR. GROVER: Then there was Interior's Bureau of Reclamation - and the water and power.

MR. PLENERT: Yes, there was Reclamation and the water and power in California, all in the Department of the Interior. There was the water and power in California with regard to the fish and endangered species there as well. It all kind of entered in. I probably spent half my life working against other Federal agencies in trying to preserve fish and wildlife resources. So it was a tough job. It was probably the toughest job I ever had. Well, it was. But it was probably the most rewarding too.

MR. GROVER: In dealing with these other Federal agencies, the relationship even though there was conflict; would you call it nasty or cordial, or…?

MR. PLENERT: Well, it was cordial when we were in the same room. But after you'd leave the room it would become nasty. They'd go to their delegation and I'd get it from the other end. The things that went on! Things would get back to D.C. that we had discussed in private before I even got a chance to get back and call my own Director. It would be back out to me again; the things that we had talked about, in trying to work our way through these issues. It was nasty, yeah. And the Forest Service, you know, they're a big agency. I think it was really tough on them to have some little two-bit agency like the Fish and Wildlife Service calling the shots, and giving them guidance on running their programs. It took a while to work that through. Of course, later after Clinton got elected; one of the things that he said in his campaign promises was that he'd come out and sit down with the people of Oregon and the Northwest and kind of come with a forest management plan.

MR. GROVER: The forest management plan? That's when he had the hearings here in Portland?

MR. PLENERT: Yes, he came out personally, him and Al Gore, the Vice President. They held a hearing all day. It was one of the highlights, if you can say that that is a highlight, was to meet the President and the Vice President on the job, which I thought was kind of interesting. He was very cordial. I got to shake his hand and talk to him for a few minutes. Not many other Regional Directors have that opportunity to talk to Presidents and Vice Presidents. In fact, I met Al Gore twice. He was out in Tacoma at another forest summit. Then we were mandated to work with the Forest Service and BLM to put together the Forest Plan. They appointed a guy by the name of Jack Ward Thomas from the Forest Service to head up the Committee to write the Plan and to determine what they could log, and where they couldn't. They also had to determine where the endangered species fit. They had to look at just the big picture of all of the species operating a given ecosystem rather than just the owl, or the Murrelet. There were box turtles and all kinds of other animals, and plants involved that they looked at. It kind of took the pressure off of me as a Regional Director because we were operating by The Plan. But it made our people in the Region work harder because they had to work more with the other agencies and even station some [people] at the Forest Service and BLM offices. So when they put together their management plans or their timber cutting plans, we were on the ground floor. We tried to avoid the conflicts. So that was kind of gratifying.

But California was a whole other issue. It's all geared down to people vying for the same space and territory as the wildlife and usually wildlife looses. You have all of these developments and all of these things going on. And every time you turned over a new stone in California, you'd discover a new endangered species. Even the little delphi sand flower loving fly, which was on about two sections of land and we listed that little critter. It was kind of strange to list a fly under the Endangered Species Act. There were so many different things that there was never a dull moment. There is no question about that.

But I think that one of reasons why I survived and lasted until I retired was that I put my faith in our people. I have always thought that the Fish and Wildlife Service personnel, the people that worked for us, were probably the most precious resource that we were managing. I gave a lot of credit, all of the credit to the people working for us. In fact that's what really made us work together as a team, all the people in the field and all of the people in the Regional Office that worked on the various programs. I am very much a people person, there's no question about that.

Another thing that I did was to make a special effort to learn to know who the Congressional people of California and outside. You couldn't do that for all; there were hundreds. But just the ones that really mattered; especially ones like George Miller and some of the special people that were in charge of committees and that sort of thing. And of course, there were the two Senators there. I knew all of the major players in the States pretty much; the Senators and most of the Representatives on a first name basis. I think that helped a lot too. It got so that if they had an issue, rather than write a letter they would pick up the phone and call me and we'd talk about before they would write a letter to complain about something. I headed off a lot of Congressional letters that way. I think that really helped a lot. I could call Mark Hatfield who was a major player, a senior Senator from Oregon. I would just pick up the phone and if he was there he'd take the call or he'd call me back. We did this on numerous occasions with all of the Senators. There was Harry Reid from Nevada and it worked out really well. The only one that I didn't get along with real well was Slade Gorton from Washington. But I don't know if anybody ever got along with him well. I think that's one of the reasons why I think I did really well as a Regional Director in Region 1. Not many people thought that a person could last

that many years and deal with the issues that we had to deal with here.

MR. GROVER: You mentioned earlier that the Service never lost a court case based on biology. But the Service did lose court cases?

MR. PLENERT: Yes.

MR. GROVER: On process?

MR. PLENERT: Yes. When we failed to follow the law! When we didn't follow the process of the law, we lost cases, yes we did. Not very many, but we did. A lot of times we didn't comply in the length of time [given]. You know, you have a certain amount of days spelled out in most laws that you have to do something. We'd miss the deadline, and somebody would watch the Federal Register and follow suit. We settled in compromise on a lot of those issues. It cost us more money than it did in species. We were overburdened with lawsuits. That's what the problem was. We didn't have enough people to keep up with the workload.

MR. GROVER: You mentioned budgets. With all of the important issues going on here, and the attention that they were getting at the national level, what was your consideration about the budget that was coming to Region 1?

MR. PLENERT: It was very good. In fact, I can't remember the exact dollar figures. I was sitting here trying to do that. But when I first came to Region 1, I think it was something like ten million, or something like that. And I think that when I left it was over a hundred million. We got a tremendous amount of increases, in Endangered Species and Ecological Services, Refuges and some in Fisheries. Of course, our Fisheries program in Region 1, that was before the listing of salmon. The Fishery people were primarily working on hatchery related items for wild salmon; like what effect hatchery fish have on wild salmon coming back up the streams, and disease issues and things like that. They also worked very closely with the Tribes [Indian] on harvest figures and that sort of thing. Thank God, I had retired before the salmon issue [came to the forefront]. I had always said that the salmon issue would make the spotted owl look pale, with all of the issues involved with it. Of course the National Marine Fisheries Service was a primary responsibility for salmon, but it made the spotted owl look pretty tame with all of the issues.

Our Fishery people were involved in every one of those issues as well. We had probably the best Fishery program in any Region. There were a lot of Fisheries that were funded under the Mitchell Act, as mitigation hatcheries. There were some real large anadromous fish hatcheries; Dworshak National Fish Hatchery was one of the largest of course. It was kind of rewarding. But there were quite a few conflicts with the Endangered Species Act. For example, the sea turtle; when it was out in the ocean, it was the responsibility of the National Marine Fisheries Service, and when it came ashore it was the responsibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service. I will never forget the first time that I went to Guam. It was one of the Trust Territories at the time. You'd walk into the Woolworth store, or the five and dime and they were selling sea turtle or tortoise jewelry, right over the counter. This was an endangered species, and I wondered, 'how the hell can that be?' I started asking questions and found that they make it in the territory prison there on Guam. We tried to get that halted and changed but it never worked. They were still selling tortoise jewelry. And they got into other political issues and they seceded as a Trust territory for other reasons, so we weren't involved there anymore. But who knows what's going on. Maybe it wasn't that important either, I don't know.

MR. GROVER: You talked a lot about the Endangered Species program, but on your watch here, what was the climate in National Wildlife Refuges? What was the major emphasis?

MR. PLENERT: In Refuges, it was very good, and very positive. I think the Refuge people in Region 1 felt, for the first time, that they had a Regional Director that really cared about Refuges. Almost all of them that preceded me were either in Ecological Services or Research or something other than wildlife. They really didn't have a background in Wildlife Refuges. I know that more than one Refuge Manager told me that they really had a good feeling about having somebody that really cared about them. It is still like that today. When you look around the various regions, I don't think that we have anybody, a Regional Director that has any Refuge background. Most of them came through the ranks in Eco-Services, or were appointed that didn't come through the ranks. A number of them were Research and a couple of Fisheries guys. I guess there are. One of them is in Alaska and where's the other one? Where is Dale Hall?

MR. GROVER: He came up through ES. He cut his teeth in …

MR. PLENERT: He was in the Washington office for Fisheries, and then he went over to ES. But for the most part Refuges, I was and still am a strong supporter of Refuges because it's a known fact that if you don't have habitat to manage, you don't have wildlife. You have to have the base lands to manage in order to preserve and protect critters and wildlife species that we are responsible for. I was also a strong advocate of land acquisition. A number of refuges were established while I was Regional Director here in Region 1. In California there was one, and a number of them in Oregon.

MR. GROVER: What was the one in California?

MR. PLENERT: One of the things that I said that I felt like we accomplished when I was in Region 1 was the expansion of the land base for refuges. We established several new ones. One was right outside of Sacramento to the south. It was farmlands that flooded a lot. It was in the floodplain. It was very controversial. We got that one established. Then there was one in Oregon between Portland and the little town of Sherwood. It was along the Tualatin River. There was one along the coast called Nestucca. There were several in Hawaii. We brought Midway Island on line and we expanded the Hawaiian Forest. We bought a lot of land around San Francisco Bay. We solved a couple of issues there with regard to that little mouse that was endangered. It was the salt marsh

harvest mouse. There was a tract of land right across from the headquarters at San Francisco Bay that this developer owned. He was going to put houses in. The local population never liked the guy and they were opposed to it. It was a kind of a deal where it used to be a golf course. Somebody closed the flap-gate so the ocean water wouldn't run in there. If it did run in there, it would get trapped. So the wetlands area increased from like nine acres to thirty acres. It was a one hundred and twenty acre tract. And the next thing you knew, there was forty acres and the guy finally put in his plans to build.

Our people thought that we should oppose him and that we shouldn't allow him to go ahead with his development plans because of the little mouse. My tactic was that I didn't think we could take the land from him unless we buy it. I didn't think we could use the Endangered Species Act to keep the guy from making a living. I went and met with him. I told him that we would buy the whole darn thing from him. He said that he would sell all but fifteen acres to us, which was upland. We bought it, and the local people were not very happy with me. It was during the last week that I was in office that I did that. I got that issue settled. I still feel it was the right thing. I get calls today from people, even the ones that opposed me, telling me that it was the right thing to do. There were just a lot of little issues like that. We expanded several refuges in Hawaii and established some new ones. There was Kealia Pond and several others. We bought a lot of land too.

MR. GROVER: What happened with Law Enforcement while you were here?

MR. PLENERT: When I first came to the Region, the decision was already made to build a Law Enforcement Forensic Lab. The construction had already started. The decision was to put it in Oregon. It was a political decision. Senator Hatfield was a primary mover on our Appropriations Committee and he was instrumental in getting it in his State, which was fine. We all supported that. And Ashland, Oregon was a primary place because you could recruit people there very well. If you'd have put it in any other big city, you'd have had a hard time recruiting all of these specialists that we would need at the Lab. We started the Lab, and hired the Director there. It started off kind of slow, but it was still supervised out of our office in Portland. Dave McMullen was the Law Enforcement Assistant Regional Director. He supervised the operation. I know that on numerous occasions folks in the Washington Office wanted to pull the supervision back. But in every case, the Director overruled them and said, "No, we're going to keep it in Portland because they are doing a good job with it." The Lab has expanded and hired a lot of staff. And their capabilities of what they've done. Some of it was just beyond me. They could tell the difference between African ivory and Indian elephant or walrus. They did DNA samples on all wild animals. They could tell by looking at feathers what bird it was. When an animal died, they could tell [why] just like human forensics. They have developed tremendous capabilities. And today it's a world-renowned laboratory of wildlife forensics. It's really one of the success stories in Law Enforcement for the Fish and Wildlife Service. It has a lot of support.

MR. GROVER: What about your Law Enforcement field people in dealing with spotted owl violations, and logging?

MR. PLENERT: We got a lot of tips that people were deliberately killing spotted owls but I think that while I was in the Region, we only had two cases that we could prove that someone had deliberately cut down timber or did something to harm an owl. For the most part, the people that managed the forests were pretty good at protecting the species. They didn't wantonly go out, although it caused them a hardship, they pretty much followed the law. We didn't have many problems with Law Enforcement to speak of. One of the biggest issues with Law Enforcement was the taking of migratory birds by the Tribal fishermen. Over off the coast of Washington they had several salmon seasons where they could use gill nets, or set nets and they caught tremendous amounts of sea birds. There were Murrelets, and hawks and things like that. We tried to put a stop to that, and it was really a tough one to fight. We finally got, when I left the job, an agreement that they would cut back on the time of day, and they would have observers on the boats and that sort of thing. That was a real tough issue. Dealing with the Tribes, I don't know how many there are, probably hundreds of them in this Region, every one of them wants to be their own sovereign nation. So in dealing with the Tribes, you had to work together with them because they managed a lot of lands. I don't know if they were sovereign nations or not, but they were entities on their own and you couldn't or shouldn't do anything without consulting with Tribes. They were very much partners in the fish and wildlife management in the northwest. There is no question about that. I think that this is something that we learned through time. We had to and did work with the Tribes. Of course, at every meeting that you went to, there was Tribal representation as well.

MR. GROVER: So, with all of this fun going on, you decided to retire?

MR. PLENERT: Yes, I retired in 1994, after thirty-three years in the Fish and Wildlife Service. I think that during that time I worked for seven Regional Directors, eight Directors. There were eight different Presidents in office. I can't remember how many different supervisors that I had, but there were quite a few. The toughest part of retirement was probably not missing the day-to-day issues, but the camaraderie with the employees and the people that you associate with on a day-to-day basis. That was probably the toughest part of leaving the job after thirty-three years. Right now, I am busy. I am fishing and hunting and having a great time.

MR. GROVER: Now that you've been retired for a few years, and you've had a chance, what do you view as some of the major changes to the Fish and Wildlife Service over the span of your career both beneficial and perhaps things that needed to be revisited?

MR. PLENERT: I think some of the biggest changes are obviously that the Fish and Wildlife Service has gotten Congressional mandates to do certain things. When I first started in the 1960's and in the earlier days, they had what they called River Basin offices, which are Ecological Services now. They'd be asked to do a report like on putting in a dam on a

major river. They would do a major study and submit a report and it carried no weight. The Army Corps of Engineers might accept small provisions of it, or maybe none, meaning no minimum flows. But today, with the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act they are obligated or required to use input from the Fish and Wildlife Service. You are required to ask for information. In other words, the Fish and Wildlife Service has gotten an Organic Act in Refuges and the Coordination Acts on environmental issues and legal authority to be a stronger voice in fish and wildlife conservation issues than they did back years ago. It's the Endangered Species Act, Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and all those acts. It's just that you do the biologic studies and surveys and reports, and now they mean something where before they didn't. I think that that was probably the major change in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

You've never, ever have enough money to manage lands. There will always be a backlog of maintenance on wildlife refuges, and hatcheries and facilities that the Fish and Wildlife Service is required to manage. It's a revolving thing. It's just like your own home. Every day, there is something. If you use it, it goes wrong. You either fix it or neglect it. And you can neglect it only for so many years and then it falls apart. I think that what I'd like to see, and you hear it about how people are managing the Service today, are putting more emphasis on getting funding for Refuges. I am not sure that they are. I think it may be outside forces that are causing them to do it. The conservation organizations like the Wildlife Federation, or the Audubon Society those sorts of groups, they are helping the Service get money for these sorts of things more than anything else.

One of the worst things that ever happened to the Service was when the Clinton administration came in and the Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt decided to get rid of the Fish and Wildlife Service's research arm. They tried to transfer it to a separate bureau. I talked to him personally and he blamed the spotted owl. He called it a "train wreck" that went on in the Region out here. There were conflicting studies. And that wasn't the case at all. It was all political. When BLM and Senator Packwood decided to call in the "God Squad" on the spotted owl, the Fish and Wildlife Service won those cases hands down. The "God Squad" is a provision of the Endangered Species Act that allows it to be overridden if the Secretary of the Interior believes that there is a greater economic and political gain than listing a certain species or carrying through with a certain species. They picked out several key logging sales at that time, and BLM at the insistence of Packwood and the Director of BLM at the time, and of course Manuel Lujan; no, this was before Clinton, but they decided to challenge the Endangered Species Act. They lost that one, but we relied tremendously on our research branch; the universities and cooperative units at the universities, all of the wildlife managers and Ph.D.s Directors that were there. We used those people and their data a lot. Babbitt thought that that was a "train wreck." So that was one of the reasons that he decided to pull all of the research units out of the Service and put them in a separate unit. I guess now they are under USGS [U.S. Geological Survey]. I talk to people today in the Service and they are not utilizing these folks hardly at all. If they do any research, they contract it with Universities or outside sources. They aren't using our former research arm. They took all of the laboratories. The one that was in Jamestown, North Dakota was established for waterfowl, it's gone and nobody is utilizing it anymore. I think that was one of the biggest setbacks that happened to the Service in those years that I saw. There was no way you could change it. We tried everything, but it didn't work.

MR. GROVER: During your career was there someone that stands out as a mentor, that's been a particular help with you?

MR. PLENERT: I don't think so. As I said, I worked in a number Regions, and knew a lot of good wildlife people. But as far as mentoring my career after somebody, or someone who I would go to for advice, I can't recall right off of the bat that there was anybody. I had a lot of good friends that I would call for advice and that sort of thing. But no, I never did have a mentor that I can think of.

MR. GROVER: Does anyone during your career really stand out as being an exemplary person who really benefited the Fish and Wildlife Service?

MR. PLENERT: Yeah, there were a lot of them. One of the people that I had a lot of respect for in the Migratory Bird field was Harvey Nelson. He was the Regional Director of Region 3 and he ended up as the Chairman of the North American Waterfowl Plan before he retired. Harvey was a fantastic person. Of course, I mentioned Harvey Willoughby who was a fantastic person as far as Fishery resources. I thought that those two guys stood out. But there were lots of them. I dealt with a lot of people over the years. But to me, Harvey Nelson was a true professional. There's no question about that.

MR. GROVER: With many years as a Supervisor, you had an influence in hiring people. Is there somebody that you had influence on who has really made a yeoman career? Who really stands out as a young person? During your tenure have you seen a change in the kinds of people who are working for the Fish and Wildlife Service, or a change in attitudes from when you were hired and working your way up?

MR. PLENERT: Yeah, I can. I did. When I first started out I didn't know anybody that worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service that wasn't trained as a Biologist. In the professional field, it would be either Fish or Wildlife Management. I think with the changing of the Civil Service grading system in the early 1970's when the Regional Directors and the Directorate in Washington went from a GS classification to the SES, there started to be a change in the type of personnel that were hired. In fact, in the early 1970's, a Regional Director in Region 2 was a planner in D. C. with no biological background. He was the first one that I knew of. Everybody complained about it, but it didn't do any good. You started to see a trend from that time on. People that didn't have a biological background but were either connected politically or some other ways started to get put into these key positions. You can look around today for example, the guy in Refuges, Dan Ashe, he came from The Hill. He worked for the Congress. His father was a Realty Specialist in Boston for a number of years. That was Bill Ashe.

And Dan came up through the Congressional route… and there were a lot of them like that. There was a guy who was the Regional Director in Region 3 that came up through Realty, which is fine. I mean, I don't have any problem with that. But you can look at numerous others, over the last twenty years, numerous Regional Directors that had no biological background. And I think that causes a big problem with your employees that try to work really hard to try to move up through the biological system. When they get up to about the position where they can get a higher level, and they put somebody from another agency or with no background in Fish and Wildlife; I think that hurts an agency a lot. You lose a lot of the camaraderie.

Another thing that happens a lot; and I never did during my tenure as a Regional Director, would assign a Supervisor from one branch to another in a high level position. For example, take somebody from Ecological Services at GS-14 and put them on a Refuge or at a Hatchery. I resisted that and would never do it. And today, that's happening quite regularly. In fact, it just happened in Region 1. They took a Supervisor from Ecological Services and moved that person to the William Finley Refuge in Oregon as the Manager without advertising the position. That kind of hurts the troop's morale. What's the point of working real hard and trying to move up the ranks when the high level positions are given to somebody else and you don't have a chance to compete for them? I don't agree with that at all. It's happening more and more and more. Thank God, the regulations or the law requires that a Director has to have a Natural Resources background, or we'd have Department of the Army people, or who knows what, managing the Fish and Wildlife Service. That's one good thing that's still in place.

MR. GROVER: Does the development of managerial skills also have an influence on these people that are put in these positions?

MR. PLENERT: Oh probably. It might. You kind of have to look at the background where they came from, and who they are. I can't say that they are bad people or bad managers. I don't know whether they are good managers or not. But they lack the background to make decisions on fish and wildlife resources without having a cadre of biologists sitting by their side. They can't go to a meeting without taking a half a dozen people along to help make a decision. It just doesn't happen. Where people that are trained, they can make those decisions right on the spot. I think that it hurts morale. But government is heading in that direction anyhow all agencies, not just the Fish and Wildlife Service. It's kind of a sign of the times I think. It goes also to those folks that are out of their element. There was one fellow that I used to beat him all of the time for resources because we had a better Region!

MR. GROVER: Marv, it's down to reminisce time. I'm going to tell a story that I heard about you and let you comment as to whether there is any truth to it. As a young man in wetlands acquisition in your early North Dakota days; there is a story about you back in those dire days when there was hardly enough money to put food on the table, that you would go out on a Saturday morning with a gun case with a 2"x4" in it, and against your wife's better judgment or her interest, you'd tell her that you were going to get your gun fixed. But in town you would buy a gun, you would take the 2"x4" out and bring back a real gun. And in this way, you ended up with a tremendous collection of guns. Would you care to comment on the truthfulness of that story?

MR. PLENERT: Well, I do. It's not a true story but the telling it makes for a good one. I did have an opportunity to be quite a collector of old rifles. I bought a lot of them in the Dakotas. Whenever I'd go through a town, I'd stop for lunch and check out the hardware store as well as the restaurant. Not saying that I bought any while I was working. I don't know if I did or not, I don't remember. But no, I'd heard that story too, and that didn't happen. Although it would work!

But I'll have to tell you a kind of an interesting story that happened when I was Regional Director, in fact two stories. When we listed the desert tortoise in Nevada, it was a week or ten days after we had listed it, I got a phone call from a lawyer down there who represented several of those big casinos, and they owned a lot of land that they were going to develop. His first words were, "Well Mr. Plenert, if we give you a million dollars would you go away?" And I thought for a minute, and I finally said, "You know, I'm only like fifty-eight years old. If I were a year older, I'd take your million dollars and retire!" He said, "Oh, I don't mean you personally!" What they wanted to do was give us a million dollars to set up a place to collect tortoises when we picked them up off of these lots and put them in a "concentration camp" or whatever you call it, so they wouldn't kill them.

Then there was another story. There was a place in California. And this is a true story. There was a place called Dana Point. The land is worth so much a square inch rather than [foot or acre]. They've got some fancy resorts down there. There is lodging and hotels. This guy owned eleven acres, and he was going to put in a big hotel. The Fish and Wildlife Service had always used for the endangered species aspect, the colleges and professors and scientists in locating species and telling us how many there are and whether they are in trouble or imperiled. There was a little mouse there. I don't remember the name of it now, but they found ten or eleven mice on this particular guy's property. So he called me and he says, "Well Mr. Plenert, what can I do?" And I said, "Well, I don't know about you, but if I owned eleven acres that's worth a million dollars a square foot, I think I'd go down to the dog pound and get about ten cats and put them on my property." And he said, "You're serious?" I told him I was only kidding, but that it as an interesting thought. But that was another one. You had to keep a sense of humor or you'd go stark raving mad on these jobs. They are tough to deal with on a daily basis. But we always had a lot of fun. So, that's it.

MR GROVER: Thank you, Marv for taking the time and for this opportunity.